



# Could the sound of hair brushing help you get to SLEEP?



Gone are the nights of counting sheep to drift off. Today, there are some strange and very modern sleep aids to help you get some shut-eye

**I**f you struggle to nod off, you're not alone. Around 12% of women experience sleep complaints and this number dramatically increases to 40% as women reach their late 40s and early 50s, since the menopause can wreak havoc on sleep. Our slumber is also affected when we feel anxious or stressed.

Often, we're told that the solution is 'sleep hygiene'. Broadly, this revolves around getting into a good bedtime routine. It could mean making sure your bedroom is a calming space or having a warm bath before going to bed.

If you've tried the tips and still struggle to drop off, there are hi-tech options you can turn to, including relaxing audio and video content on computers and smartphones, including hypnosis and ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) – a 'weird sensation that feels good', which people get from watching or listening to something soothing.

'These tools can help you wind down,' says sleep expert Stephanie Romiszewski (sleepyheadclinic.co.uk). 'While they won't fix sleeping disorders, they can help you relax and avoid sleep problems.' We round up the latest sleep trends worth trying. ➔

## TINGLING SENSATIONS

You might have already heard of ASMR – the trend has been taking video sites such as YouTube by storm for the past decade; there are more than 25m videos on the site dedicated to it. But what does it mean?

ASMR stands for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, a relaxing physical sensation often described as ‘tingles’. Most ASMR videos are intended to be comforting; Emma Smith, who has more than 1m followers on her YouTube channel, WhispersRed ASMR, describes the sensation as ‘a soft and dreamy state of being, usually triggered by whispering, light sounds and light touch, such as back tracing or hair touching’. According to Emma, you don’t have to experience these motions in real life – videos work just as well.

‘An ASMR video uses visuals, sounds and a nurturing voice to induce tingles in the viewer, but you can also just feel deeply relaxed watching them,’ says Emma. ‘The idea is to immerse the viewer and help them feel calm.’ For example, some videos might recreate serene real-life scenarios, such as a facial appointment or visiting a library, including all the relaxing sounds of the process, such as the sound of a bottle spritzing during a facial, or the fluttering of pages when you’re checking out a book.

So, how could you use ASMR to fall asleep? ‘I like to have my phone by my side while I get ready for bed,’ says Emma. ‘Sometimes, I have my earphones in while I take off my makeup or I’m cleaning my teeth, then I’ll listen and watch for a little while before switching off my phone and falling asleep.’

**TIP:** Not all ASMR sounds will have a calming effect on you, as everyone is different. Hair brushing might work for some, while the sound of stacking jars in a cupboard may work for others. Find what’s right for you by searching for videos on YouTube.



Researchers at the University of Oxford found counting sheep was no better than doing nothing at all for people struggling with insomnia.

## HYPNOTIC SOUNDS

For people who struggle with a racing mind, cognitive hypnotherapy is a form of talking therapy that works to help people make positive changes to their problematic thoughts, behaviours and feelings. A 2018 study found hypnosis is a promising treatment for sleep problems, yet the merits of sleep hypnosis are still being investigated.

Clementine, an app dedicated to women, uses cognitive hypnotherapy to help users feel calmer. ‘The best sleep hypnosis teaches you tips for how to get to sleep,’ says Kim Palmer, founder of Clementine. ‘We all know how to fall asleep – it’s a natural process – but sometimes we need a bit of help relaxing into it.’ The app features different recordings, including guided

visualisations, breathing exercises and hypnotic suggestions, to calm the body and mind, with sessions to play either before you sleep or while you are sleeping. For example, one recording tells listeners to imagine their worries are rocks in their pockets and to visualise throwing these rocks into a babbling brook and watching them drift away. Download the Clementine app for a free seven-day trial. Subscription costs £4.99 a month.

Another self-hypnosis app is Reveri, founded by psychiatrist Dr David Spiegel, which uses self-hypnosis to support sleep, reduce anxiety and help focus. The app has a hypnotisability test that tells you how susceptible to hypnosis you are. Subscription costs £8.17 a month.

Words Bryony Gooch Photography Getty



## BEDTIME STORIES

Remember how easy it was to fall asleep as a child when someone read to you at bedtime? Apps such as Calm and Headspace offer story audios to immerse you into a relaxing narrative.

They often feature celebrity narrators. Calm has the likes of Kate Winslet and Mary Berry reading stories in which characters go through positive emotional experiences. Headspace’s sleepcasts have figures such as John Legend reading scripts that don’t conform to typical story structures – listen from where you wish without missing anything. Both apps offer sleep meditations that teach mindfulness techniques.

‘Audio aids can prepare your body and mind for a restful night,’ says Kessonga Giscoombe, Headspace’s meditation and mindfulness teacher. ‘Meditations can lower your heart rate and encourage slower breathing, which helps the body enter a state of relaxation.’

Download the Headspace app for a free 14-day trial. Subscription costs £49.99 a year. Download the Calm app for a free seven-day trial. Subscription costs £39.99 a year.



Drift off to the voices of Kate Winslet, John Legend and Mary Berry

## WHAT HELPS YOU GET TO SLEEP?

On our reader panel, we asked you how you drift off...

‘I have a proper sleep routine that I go through, starting with reciting a verse from a poem or hymn, then using yoga deep-breathing techniques for a few minutes.’ *Miranda*

‘I watch an episode of something in the living room. My bedroom is a no-tech and no-lights zone.’ *Paloma*

‘I usually read before bed and try to stay off my phone as I find this helps with settling down for the night. I also don’t drink any caffeine after 4pm.’ *Hayley*

## SONIC HUES

If you find listening to people’s voices too distracting to get you to sleep, the sounds of white, brown or pink noise may work for you. These ‘sonic hues’ are constant noises with different frequencies that create a ‘noise blanket’, preventing distraction from other sounds. Studies show listening to these may promote better sleep quality and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.

White noise sounds similar to television static or a humming fan; while brown noise is a lower frequency, like the rumbling of thunder or a waterfall; and pink noise sounds like a heartbeat.

Headspace has audio tracks that allow you to try the full range of sonic hues. Spotify has playlists dedicated to the different noises.



## WHAT ABOUT BLUE LIGHT?

Many experts warn that looking at screens before bed is detrimental to sleep due to exposure to ‘blue light’. But what is it? It’s just a part of the visible light spectrum, says Stephanie Romiszewski, and while the sun is our biggest source of it, it’s also emitted by LED lights and screens. ‘Light is influential to your circadian rhythm; it makes you feel more awake, while darkness helps you feel more sleepy.’

But, according to Stephanie, blue light isn’t the main issue with using your phone. It’s what you’re doing on your phone right before

bed that impacts your sleep. ‘Your brain associates your phone and laptop with what you do during the day, whether that’s checking social media, messages or work,’ she says. ‘It doesn’t help you wind down. Instead,

your brain will reduce melatonin and increase cortisol.’ This can make you feel stressed and wired, rather than relaxed and tired.

So, it’s okay to use tech for soothing content, but to avoid the harm of blue light, most phones and tablets have blue light filters and dark-mode settings.

**WHY NOT TRY...**  
the Morphée sleep aid (£89.95, [morphee.co.uk](http://morphee.co.uk))? It contains more than 200 meditations created by sleep professionals and it’s blue-light-free.